

It was at once assumed that when he spoke of some great nation, Mr. Taft had Great Britain in his mind. What was confident conjecture then is a certainty now. Asked in the House of Commons whether it were true that the Government of the United States had expressed itself willing to negotiate a treaty under which all disputes of whatever nature between the two countries should be referred to arbitration, and what steps he would take to promote that object, the British Premier, Mr. Asquith, made answer on the 7th day of March, as follows:

His Majesty's Ambassador at Washington has reported that the United States Government contemplates proposing such a treaty and a reply has been sent that any proposals they may make will of course meet with the most sympathetic consideration.

That was good and decisive, but there was better to follow.

On the 13th day of March, during the debate on the Naval Estimates, the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, after speaking in a rather despondent tone of the growing burden of military and naval expenditures, and of the difficulty of checking it under existing conditions of Europe, said:

I can conceive but one thing which will really affect the military and naval expenditure of the world on the wholesale scale on which it must be affected if there is to be a real and sure relief. You will not get it until nations do what individuals have done—come to regard an appeal to the law as the natural course for nations instead of an appeal to force.

It was a new note in the discussion, and coming from the representative of the government, at once arrested the attention of the House. In justification of his belief, that the disputes of nations may some day be decided by process of law and their armies be only an international police force, Sir Edward Grey read to the House the two paragraphs from the speeches of Mr. Taft which I have just quoted. Now see how the American proposal was met. Sir Edward Grey answered for England thus:

Supposing two of the greatest nations in the world were to make it clear to the whole world that by an agreement of such a character as under no circumstances were they going to war again, I venture to say that the effect on the world at large of the example would be one that would be bound to have beneficent consequences . . . I have spoken of that because I do not think that a statement of that kind put forward by a man in the position of the President of the United States should go without response. Entering into an agreement of that kind, there would be great risks. It would entail certain risks for us to refer everything to arbitration, and as the President of the